

Reconciliation Week: Recognising Lorna 'Nanna Nungala' Fejo

National Reconciliation Week is celebrated across Australia each year between 27 May and 3 June. The dates commemorate two significant milestones in the reconciliation journey; the anniversaries of the successful 1967 referendum and the High Court Mabo decision. The theme for this year is Let's Talk Recognition; with a focus on how Australians can better recognise each other, and recognise the contributions, cultures and histories of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

Lorna 'Nanna Nungala' Fejo is the Warumungu woman, named by the Australian Prime Minister, Kevin Rudd, in his historic Apology to the Stolen Generations. Born in the late 1920s, Fejo at just four years of age was forcibly removed from her family and community at Tennant Creek.



What was it like being a part of the Stolen Generation and how does it affect you today?

My Mother fretted for me every day until the day she died.

I was 14 when I was told the news of her death. I was at Crocker Island at the time, as it was just after the bombing of Darwin, this is where all us 'coloured kids' were evacuated to. My brother bought me a guitar to comfort me as he broke the news. We created a band and I found comfort in music – I still love playing the mouth organ.

As kids of the Stolen Generation we lived one day at a time, we didn't look into the future.

What happened when you were reunited with your family?

When I returned to country my family said "Nungala your one of us" and they accepted me. I had to go through women's business ceremony to claim my rights and my land (Tennant Creek area and Alice Springs area).

Later, as a teacher I developed medical resources and went to communities to help my people. My job was to prevent aids in communities, encouraging the use of condoms. I also developed a program still used by health workers today. The Strong Women, Strong Babies, Strong Culture program, uses graphic pictures as a way of helping Aboriginal people learn about staying strong and growing strong children.



Lorna 'Nanna Nungala' Fejo
shares her story with former PM
Kevin Rudd in 2008

What advice would you give to people, Indigenous and non Indigenous?

Make life what you want it to be. If I can do it, you can do it, you can help someone. You don't have to waste life drinking and smoking – chuck it away! Think about the people around you and think about how you can help.

The theme for this year is reconciliation is recognition; that is recognising Indigenous people contributions and history. What does this mean to you?

We were always pushed aside from government. When we grew up we looked for our family and they looked for us. I own land where they want to put a nuclear waste dump – I don't want to see waste ending up in our water.

Your son Richard Fejo works at NTGPE as a Senior Cultural Educator, training the next generation of doctors that will contribute to Indigenous health. How proud does this make you feel?

I have children and grandchildren that I am so proud of. You tell me how this came to be? I'm a stolen generation girl – I'm a bush girl – and yet I have children and grandchildren contributing to helping, not just Indigenous people, but all Australians.

Richie is training a generation of doctors that will work across Australia particularly in remote Indigenous communities. Another one of my daughters is a doctor, as is one of my granddaughters. They followed in my footsteps of helping our people.

Richard Fejo training
Prevocational Doctors
during a NTGPE Cultural
Orientation in 2013



Later this week NTGPE staff will be welcoming Lorna Fejo as a guest of honour at an internal National Sorry Day Morning Tea.

"Make life what you want it to be. If I can do it, you can do it, you can help someone. You don't have to waste life drinking and smoking – chuck it away! Think about the people around you and think about how you can help."